

The Ballarat Naturalist

October 2017



Native Plants in the Melton Botanic Garden

Presented by David and Barbara Pye

Our speakers were uniquely placed to tell us about the Melton Botanic Garden, having been involved in initiating, developing and maintaining the project over ten years. Their contributions particularly focus on the Eucalyptus Arboretum and the Western Australian/South Australian Garden. Among the many other sections are Indigenous and Bush Foods areas, South African, Mediterranean and American plantings, each with their own supporters.



Melton Botanic Gardens, WA garden

Photo:Val Hocking

Positioned on the intermittent Ryans Creek, the 24 hectare site was previously farmed until coming under local council protection, 40 years ago. At that time, various Australian trees were planted and they, along with older River Red Gums, survive as tall features throughout the area. The undeveloped site languished until a group of plant enthusiasts saw potential for more ambitious plans.

A \$100 donation in 2010 set things rolling. The Pyes then purchased suitable seeds, succeeded with their germination and thus produced plants for the initial planting the following year in the Eucalyptus Arboretum. Great care had been taken in choosing species likely to prosper there in Melton. It is a dry and windy site, prone to frost and

intermittent flooding from the creek. It features fertile and well-drained soils, with thick mulching (these days often of deep layer of river sand) to retain moisture and reduce weeds. Nevertheless, experience over that time continues to refine the plan, with changes tried where plants do not prove suitable, with some difficult areas still seen as “works in progress”.

In recent years, a Friends Group has managed the area and coordinated the work of many volunteers. They operate a nursery to propagate stock for planting and also open for public sales several times a week. The site



also benefits from the very **Photo:** Coral Gum *Eucalyptus torquata* strong contribution of training groups for the unemployed, with other Centrelink recipients able to work there to meet requirements for voluntary community hours.

The Melton City Council has recognised the Botanic Garden as a major community resource in this newly urbanised area. It now provides major funding and support which underpins current and future plans, including better road access.

So, many large horticultural and landscaping tasks have been completed with quite a range of interesting areas now available to the public at all times. People can visit the Koori ceremonial area or amphitheatre (perhaps for performances of events); birdwatchers will appreciate the variety of habitats nurturing at least 65 species; a sensory garden may be of interest to some disabled visitors; families can stroll, play or walk their dogs. Educational signage and labelling of plants adds immediate information, and a series of detailed brochures is also being developed. Much of this, and current events and activities can also be found on the website: www.fmbg.org.au .

Barbara provided a beautifully illustrated account of the native plantings to conclude the presentation.

So interesting in itself, the talk was the perfect introduction for our field trip to the gardens the following day. We were certainly inspired by the commitment of our two knowledgeable and enthusiastic speakers and we were keen to visit what impressed us as a most worthwhile community asset.

Shirley Faull

- *****
- Two opportunities to visit Wookwookarung Regional Park**
1. Sat. 7 Oct. **pm** FNCB Exc. (after visiting Damascus College bush block in morning)
 2. Sun. 22 Oct. 10am - 12noon. Friends of Canadian Corridor wild-flower walk lead by FNCB members. Meet on east side of water tank, Wilson St. Bring picnic lunch to enjoy after the walk.
- *****

Excursion to the Melton Area

Melton Botanic Gardens

David and Barbara Pye welcomed ten members of our club to the Melton Botanic Gardens on a mild Saturday morning with a north wind blowing. After David and Barbara’s talk at our club meeting we were keen to see what they and other enthusiastic members of the Friends of the Melton Botanic Gardens had been able to achieve on the ground. We met for a cuppa in a well equipped volunteer staff facility near the plant nursery in Williams street, Melton.

Melton’s average rainfall is about 450mm, and a decision was made that they would try to grow plants that naturally grew in similar drier regions in Australia and South Africa and now, also in the Mediter-ranean area.

Another two members from the Friends group joined us for an inter-esting walk around the garden, starting in the sensory garden where various aromatic plants had been planted. We then proceeded to the NW portion of the Eucalyptus Arboretum. Tree species in the arboretum were planted in groups of five or more plants per species. The eucalypts in this area were mostly from WA. Ones that caught one’s eye included the large-fruited Fuchsia Gum and the Rose Mallee.



Photo: Fuchsia gum

Various Emu Bushes were grown as ground cover in this area. Two types of the Spotted Emu Bush *Eromophila maculata*, the yellow and the cerise flowered form were seen. In the Volcanic Plains In-digenous Grassy Woodland zone were several fine tall specimens of remnant Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora*. On a few of these trees bat boxes had been fixed, but no sign of bats making use of them.

The spectacular large red flowers of the *Eucalyptus caesia* subspp. *magna*, and silver grey leaves and trunk made a great display. Other



Photo: *Eucalyptus rhodantha* Dowerin Rose

eucalypts included the Wyola Mallee *Eucalyptus wyolensis* from SA, other mallee type trees *E.websteriana* from WA, the Southern Cross Silver Mallee *E.crucis* and the Square-fruited Mallee *E.calycogona*. Much use is made of sand for mulching material in the garden and Western Australia wildflowers were flourishing in the sandy

conditions. There were colourful stands of pink and white-flowered Everlasting Daisies, blue-flowered *Lechenaultia* and *Dampiera* species and the bright red flowers of *Grevillea dielsiana*.

Heavy frost this year severely damaged or killed some African plants that had been sown in the South African section of the garden. Yet several plants were flowering, Red Hot Pokers, *Kniphopias* sp., *Ericas* and *Leucadendrons*.



Photo: Red Gums Melton Gardens

There were several beds nearby where plants used by Aborigines for food or fibre were growing. Along Ryan's creek that flows sometimes through the gardens two embankments had been constructed to form small lakes. Magnificent old red gums growing near the water made a pleasant scene. An island had been built on the larger lake and it is been planted with trees and shrubs.



Photo: *Acacia denticulosa*

Some FNCB members bought plants from the nursery that they hope they will grow in the cooler and wetter conditions around Ballarat. The gardens are a work in progress and it will be interesting to return later to see how it has changed. John thanked our guides for an interesting morning.

Trench Reserve, Bacchus Marsh area

After a late lunch we drove along the old Western highway, through Bacchus Marsh to the Council Trench Reserve on Tramway Lane which is NW of Bacchus Marsh, not far from the freeway. The original idea for the reserve was to get road making materials, but the material proved unsuitable. The quarrying that was done has left



Photo: Trench rock profile

a wide trench about 40 m long and between two and five metres deep on the hillside. About 2001, there was a move to sell the reserve for housing development, but because of the rare geological nature of the reserve, petitioners were successful in getting the area protected for the future.

On the trench wall one could see the light cream coloured siltstone that was under a band of a conglomerate of round and angular pebbles that had been in a large ancient river bed. Plant fossils from the late Triassic age about 210 million years ago have been found in the rock layers. Fossils identified included horsetails, liverworts and ferns as well as cycads, ginkos and conifers. Some of these plant genera no longer grow in Australia. Alas, we did not find fossils.

We climbed the track above the trench up towards the top of Bald Hill where we got a good view of the countryside towards the south. On a sign in front of a seat, where we rested after the climb, was a panorama and description of features in the landscape. These included Mt Cottrell and the volcanic plains towards the east, the granite peaks of the You Yangs, and the Maddingley coal mine where plant fossils have also been found. We could also see the result of the Rowsley fault that caused the uplift of the Brisbane ranges and the Pentland hills. Tabletop hill towards the south-west was the result of stream erosion over four million years leaving a basalt and



scoria capped hill. Korkuperrimul creek was flowing below us in the foreground. Geologists have found rock in the upper reaches of this creek that are like rock in present day Antarctica. Thanks are due to Claire and Peter for arranging the talk and morning excursion, and John for the afternoon excursion.

Photo: Towards Tabletop Hill

Les Hanrahan

Club Weekend at Casterton

Friday 27 October – Sunday 29 October.

Book own accommodation - sheet of accommodation from Caster-

ton Visitor Centre available at FNCB meeeting.

Some things we may see:

- Bilston's Tree – a large Red Gum.*
- Glenelg and Wannon Rivers.*
- Wilkin Flora and Fauna Reserve.*

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Minutes of August general Meeting

Attendance: 22 members and three visitors were welcomed by President John Gregurke. Apol:Sophie Akers, Dave & Sullivan Horwood, Peter & Emily Noble, Marie Keatley, Tim Fletcher, Ambika & Indra Bone, Kathy Elder, Bill Murphy, Mark Moravec and John Mildren.

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Spiny Rice-flower monitoring at Skipton Common Native Grassland Reserve: 10 different field nat's donating 70 hours. 755 *Pimelea spinescens* were recorded, three times the number thought to be growing on the site. Another survey was undertaken on Monday with Skipton Primary School students and teachers, adding another 121, bringing the total to 876 and still counting.

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Planting at Woowookarung Regional Park on August 13: Three FNCB members and seventeen members of Friends of Canadian Corridor and the Ballarat Bushwalking and Outdoor Club planted

270 plants that were well watered-in by rain the following week.

New Landscape Alliance proposal and questionnaire: These have been Resources Conservation developed over the last three months by a small working group convened by Anthony Hooper from Natural League that has been meeting regularly to discuss the possibilities and issues around establishing a landscape alliance for the Ballarat region that, in working together, can access and leverage much greater funding for environmental initiatives (on ground, educational and scientific) primarily from philanthropic organisations. The survey closed on Monday 28th August and received over 100 responses. They will be used to set priorities and guide the working group's.

Nerrina Wetlands: City of Ballarat has engaged Peter Lambert

General Business Lake Wendouree weed cutting. Draft letter outlining the importance of aquatic plants in Lake to the animals of the Lake and requesting changes to weed cutting to allow floating mats of vegetation to be retained adjacent to Fairyland and reed beds. Suggestion that we contact David Coutts for extra information. Motion that John G's draft letter be finalised and sent to Council.

Call for ideas/ offers re. club presentations and field trips for next year's Syllabus- please let one of the committee members know of any ideas. Welcomed another new member : Siobhan Rogan.

Show & Tell / Field Reports

Val spotted a large flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos in Ballarat. Carol described two male Blue-billed Ducks displaying and fighting on Lake Wendouree in front of an interested female. Denis reported that Willie Wagtails were the most common bird sighted during their extensive visit to the Central WA deserts- seen every one of their 70 days away. Margaret T. has ravens nesting high in a gum tree in her garden that are feeding at least one chick.

Elsbeth watched Southern Right Whales at Logan's Beach in Warrnambool, where drones are being used to identify individual whales. She also told of a Landcare Group using remote cameras to capture animal activity – wallaby, kangaroo, Grey Shrike-thrush, but no Brush-tailed Phascogale etc. Elizabeth commented on weather: the hottest winter on record in Australia, but also the coldest nights. Claire reported that Miner's Rest Swamp has water after a lapse, and water birds are beginning to return. No Brolga sighted yet though.

Paul reported Hardenbergia and Indigophera have begun flowering at Mt Egerton. New Holland Honeyeaters have lost their first clutch of chicks but now have another nest with eggs.

CALENDAR 2017

October

- Fri 6 *Murnong Trail Damascus College: David Neate*
science teacher & sustainability coordinator
- Sat 7 **am** *Damascus College bush block: David Neate &*
pm *Woowookarung Regional Park: J Gregurke FNCB*
- 13-16 SEANA Spring Camp, Ringwood FNC
- Tues 24 Committee meeting at John Gregurke's
- 27-29 FNCB club camp, Casterton

November

- Fri 3 ***Stella Bedggood Lecture-Diamond Firetails & friends-***
Woodland bird Conservation: Tanya Loos, Connecting
Country
- Sun 5 **am** *Chepstowe grasslands: N Oddie, AM, conservationist*
pm *Snake Valley district: J Gregurke, club member*
- Tues 21 Committee meeting TBA

Committee

President	John Gregurke
Vice Pres	Fran Hanrahan
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Les Hanrahan

Andy Arnold

Bill Elder

Val Hocking

John Mildren

Correspondence: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

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Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com

Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

A monthly publication of the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Inc.

Incorporation # A0014919P ABN 13 150 403 135